

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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DELIVERED BY

CHARLES L. DUBUISSON, A. M.

PRESIDENT OF

JEFFERSON COLLEGE,

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN :

The office to which you have appointed me, is of so much importance, and so generally enlists the greatest talent and learning of our country, that were I to judge from my own feelings, I would seem incompetent to the task. Few are called to the duties on which I am about to enter, until age, years of experience, and study have prepared them for it. It were presumption in me to esteem myself equal to men who have grown grey in the pursuit of knowledge, and the science of teaching. But I will not incur the imputation of affecting modesty, by rating my abilities too low, nor will I cast a suspicion on your good sense by saying you have made an injudicious choice. Of my merits you have judged, and I confidently hope that you have not been so precipitate in your judgment, that you will repent it on more mature deliberation. Your acquaintance with me as a man and a scholar, has, I hope, induced your favorable consideration, and influenced you to appoint me Principal of the college under your charge. Any other view of the subject, is unworthy of men acting as the public guardians of the education of youth. Yet you must permit me frankly to acknowledge my incompetence to perform duties so important and arduous, with all the ability and talent desirable. Indefatigable industry and ardent zeal, may eventually render my appointment beneficial to the public and acceptable to you ; and though I cannot bring with me all the experience and wisdom the office may require, yet these two essential requisites, zeal and industry, I feel at liberty to promise, and to assure you that, if they are sufficient, you shall never have cause to repent your selection.

The office of an instructor is one of dignity. It calls forth some of the highest human powers. Man commences an existence here, which will run parallel to the existence of the Deity. The mind begins to exhibit new powers and emotions here, and it will continue to unfold its energies when the mighty fabric of the universe shall perish with infirmity. It is the duty of a teacher to assist the developement of these energies, to direct them to their proper objects and in their proper channels. Without suitable mental discipline, the mind cannot make rapid advances in the acquisition of knowledge and become acquainted with its own capabilities. It is thrown on its own resources before it is prepared for independent action. Its efforts are necessarily cramped; its noblest faculties are enervated by narrow and unworthy prejudices. The business of the teacher is to prevent these evils, by correcting erroneous impressions, enlarging the conceptions and impressing, with clearness and eloquence, the incalculable importance of knowledge, as the surest and only means of attaining power, dignity and usefulness.

Man is a compound being, partaking of animal and spiritual nature. His humanity places him at the head of the terrestrial creation, and his

mind claims alliance with the hosts of spotless intelligences that inhabit the celestial regions of light, and encircle the throne of the immaculate Divinity. His external senses are the organs by which the mind receives impressions: the mind arranges, classifies and digests, and by the reflex senses, derives new ideas from those already possessed. Without the former the mind in its present state of existence, would remain a *carte blanche* and without the latter man would be but a noble animal. These two constituents are essentially requisite to form a perfect being, and are so united by a beneficent Creator, that they have a reciprocal and happy influence on each other. By the operation of reason, the habits of the animal are formed and dignified; and by the healthful action of the corporeal functions, the intellect is assisted in its search after truth. If the soul were hurried into a higher state of existence, perhaps the flood of intellectual light which would burst upon it, would be instant annihilation. A preparatory state is necessary, and therefore—human life. If this be true, it behoves us to ascertain what are the best means of preparing for that glorious state of intellectual being, which our religion teaches we shall enjoy beyond the grave. It is a beautiful idea of the poet;—the acquisition and communication of knowledge is one of the greatest joys of paradise. From the highest seraph that burns around the throne of Heaven to the humblest inhabitant of that celestial world, the delightful employment will be to pursue the subject of his choice, with close, rapid, and unerring investigation. What mighty advances must the mind of Newton make in Astronomy during the endless ages of eternity. What exalted pleasure must that philosopher feel when standing at the centre of the creation in one “field of view,” takes in worlds and systems of worlds, whose names could not be repeated in all time! What magnificent conceptions must Locke and Stewart have, when they speak the language that angels speak, and drink the pure streams of intellect that come copious and gushing from the throne of God. What burning thoughts and living imagery must fall from David’s lips, when on his golden harp of silver chords he sings the praises of Him “who rode on a cherub and did fly.”

But, lest we be thought visionary, let us descend to subjects of more immediate utility; those which we feel and know; those of daily occurrence. Knowledge is power. When the unnumbered hordes of Persia were poured on the plains of Greece, Miltiades met them at Marathon. The barbarians were dispersed; and Greece was free. Alexander at the head of 30,000 men marched through the most populous countries on earth, defeated immense armies, subdued kings, made nations his tributaries, and placed himself on the throne of Babylon, the conqueror of the world. Cortes, at the head of a few hundred men, landed in Mexico, defeated innumerable armies of very brave men, imprisoned the monarch of a mighty empire in his own capital, and in a few years subverted a powerful nation. Miltiades, Alexander and Cortes owed their success to their knowledge of the art of war. The Pilgrim Fathers, a little band, came to North America, and in opposition to the fiercest and most ferocious men on earth, made settlements on the coast. Their heroic tho’ ignorant enemies withered before them, and in little more than two centuries a powerful republic has sprung from the bosom

of the wilderness. Before the art of printing was invented, numerous individuals were employed in transcribing books: the labor expended on a single manuscript was greater than is now necessary to print an hundred books. Knowledge has become so generally diffused, that the learning formerly locked up in the bosom of the philosopher, is now familiar to the school-boy. The circulation of literary and scientific works, is so extensive that the torch of another Omar cannot destroy them: nor can the world relapse into that intellectual and moral darkness, which for so many centuries shrouded it in thick gloom.

Before the "polarity" of the magnet was discovered, and the mariner's compass invented, the timid navigator crept timorously along the shore, not daring to lose sight of land. If a lowering cloud arose, terrified he sought the nearest shore or lost his way in the unknown sea. Now the bold sailor seeks safety from the storm in the wide bosom of the ocean, and amid the darkness and the tempest he pursues his course with unerring certainty. The "treasures of every clime" are laid open, and the most remote nations of the earth have become acquaintances and friends. Truly, knowledge is power.

We live emphatically in an age of improvement. Fifty years ago, had an individual prophesied the wonderful inventions that have been made since that period, he would have been esteemed a visionary. What imagination could have conceived the power of steam? Could our fathers have believed that the ingenuity of man can snatch the torrent from its course, and in a moment convert it into an agent which can urge the proud vessel up our rivers; that the rapid car with its splendid train, can move with the rapidity of a bird, ascend the mountain, bound over the valley, and flash, like a meteor, through the dark womb of the everlasting hills?

Shall we limit the genius of man? He ascends on the wings of the viewless air above the clouds and looks on the storm rolling beneath his feet; he descends to fearful depths in the bosom of the earth, and brings out treasures that seem forbidden to mortal use; he goes down into the dark sea, and safely walks the coral groves of ocean; he passes through the fire unscathed; he snatches the red thunderbolt from the skies, and lays it harmless at his feet; he imitates the operations of nature—the crystal and the jasper are the work of his hand; with a touch more terrible than the lightning he rends the rocks; he levels mountains, and makes rivers flow; he "places a hook in the nose of the mighty Leviathan of the deep—he binds him as a kid—he plays with him as with a bird." All this and more man has performed by industry and knowledge: yet who can say that all these wonderful achievements shall not be cast far into the shade by others still more stupendous?

If such then be the high destiny of man, and such the tremendous strides of intellect he has already made, we should make every effort at least not to be behind the age in which we live. It is especially our duty, who have the instruction of youth, to consider well what are the most efficient means of advancing those under our charge as high in the scale of intelligence as possible. The method is obvious,—to prescribe and teach such a course as will enable the alumni of our infant institution to compare with those of the most learned seminaries in our coun-

try. Permit me, therefore, to make a few remarks on the course of studies to be adopted. I shall not enter into an argument to prove the correctness of my views. It is needless to demonstrate what is already admitted, or to persuade when persuasion is rendered useless by long action.

The course of studies should be extensive, embracing every department of literature and science. By recent improvement in the art of teaching, a vast fund of ideas can be acquired in boyhood. To keep up with the times, the same advances should be made in colleges as in grammar schools; the former to commence when the latter ceases. Our "course" should therefore be much more comprehensive than it heretofore has been. A little Latin and Greek, and a few elementary branches of practical mathematics, will not satisfy the expectations of the public. Education and general intelligence is now the great desideratum throughout the continent, and this portion of it is not behind the rest. Besides much is expected from Jefferson College, the only institution to which public benefactions have been made: the community look with earnest hope that those benefactions will be judiciously appropriated. If ever it equal public expectation, it must be the literary and scientific focus of the state. Our colleges must be equal to those of the north, or they must be mere academies, dragging out a miserable existence. There can be no medium.

It is, perhaps, unwise to make any particular branches more prominent than the rest. The taste of the student will readily direct his choice. All should be taught as well as possible.

Among the first in order, (though perhaps not the first in importance,) are the ancient languages, especially Latin and Greek. Refined classical taste can be acquired no where so well as from the choice works of antiquity. We should drink of the pure fountains of Helicon, not of the streams; for their waters are stained with the soil through which they flow. The study of languages is of incalculable advantage to the student of all the sciences; by it he acquires the "copiam verborum" and familiarity with his own tongue, which can be obtained in no other way.

But mathematics should form a very important item in the early part of the course, and indeed throughout. Mathematics and languages should never be separated. The imaginative tendency of the one is corrected and relieved by the refrigerating influence of the other.

Natural science, in all its branches, should occupy a prominent place. Especially Chemistry, of so great utility in an agricultural community.

Above all, the philosophy of the mind should be cultivated with great care. This is the foundation of every science. It teaches the machinery of thought, the powers and duties of each faculty. It gives the power of abstraction and concentration of mind to a single point, which is the first mark of greatness. It strengthens, invigorates, and systematizes every mental operation.

Modern languages, extensive reading in history, in short, every thing that can refine, improve, and elevate the man, should be thoroughly taught.

Having established a comprehensive, systematic course, we should

adhere to it. It is possible, that for a time our numbers may not swell rapidly, but the foundation of our fame will become broader and surer, because it will be laid in the judgment, and not in the fancy of the community. Our institution can never prosper, if it be inferior to any in the South. And it must, as soon as possible, compete with the best northern institutions in solid learning and wholesome discipline.

We have every facility to establish a permanent and flourishing college. We have ample funds, and a healthy location. Mutual confidence exists between the board and instructors. Our board have the ability, and will to act with energy, and the instructors, though they cannot boast of grey hairs, have health, industry, and zeal. The possibility of establishing, prosperously, a college in Mississippi has already been demonstrated in our vicinity, under circumstances far less favorable than those under which we commence. Every thing promises fair. We have the feelings and judgment of the public with us. The inhabitants of the south are not now so colonial in their views as they heretofore have been. They do not now look to the "north" for every thing good as heretofore. Especially are they desirous to become more independent, so far as education is concerned. Let schools, academies, and colleges be at home, and "northern education," this merchandising of ideas, will cease. The indigenous plant will ever be preferred to the exotic.

I will not answer the objections which are urged against southern institutions. It will suffice to say, that they are the same which, in the days of our fathers, were urged against all American seminaries—the mere echo of boasting foreigners. Nor will I offer any argument to prove that southern education is to be preferred. All who are capable of investigating the subject, are alive to its importance, and all with one voice call for home education. Nothing is necessary to ensure entire success but an adequate effort.

It may now be necessary to state briefly the path I have chalked out for myself in discharging the duties of my office.

OF STUDY. My first object shall be to inspire a love of learning, an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. As the surest means of establishing this desirable end, I shall endeavor to have every branch well taught. Habits of accuracy formed in the elementary branches, generally ensures proficiency in the succeeding. An accurate scholar is always an industrious student, and the converse of this proposition is equally true. Accuracy ensures application, and application, success. *Dimidium facti, qui bene cœpit, habet.* These habits should be formed in the rudiments, because the sooner the mind becomes acquainted with its own energies; the sooner will it acquire confidence and strength. A frequent recurrence to known principles is the only ground of confidence, which will not lead to presumption and indolence. In a word, this habit once established, all future labor of both pupil and teacher will be interesting, agreeable, and profitable. When the basis is broad and firm, the superstructure may be bold and permanent.

Next in importance to habits of accuracy, is to remove that false and dangerous notion that all learning is a mystery, which none but gifted individuals and geniuses can attempt, with any hope of success, to penetrate. To this is attributable the ignorance of most men. Superficial

scholars are very much disposed to obscure what is most plain, that they may seem profound;—to muddy the shallow water, that the bottom may not be seen. The mists that surround Parnassus must be swept away, and the clear sun-light must fall on its loftiest peak, before the aspirant can gather courage to begin the ascent. If his vision be weak, and obstructed by clouds and darkness, his path rugged and steep, he will falter in his purpose, his efforts will relax, and he will despair. As all my pupils will be familiar with the principle, that all men are equal in civil and religious rights, so one of my chief objects shall be to inculcate that all are equal in intellect. The difference observable in men is not so much owing to natural endowments, as to industry and education. Industry, like faith, can remove mountains. It was a favorite saying of the greatest military genius that ever existed, “*impossible*, is the adjective of fools.” If this be true in warlike operations, it is more true when applied to the mind in search of knowledge. Common sense is the standard and test of genius. Whether this position be true or not to the full extent is of little practical importance. If the opinion of the poet,

“*Labor omnia vincit*
Improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas,”

be established, it will be sufficient. With industry, none have failed to reach the goal of their wishes; and without it, none have succeeded.

The mere acquisition of knowledge, however, is a small part of education. There is another, much more important part:—rigid mental discipline. Ideas obtained without the process of mental appropriation are comparatively useless. A great reader, who is not likewise a great thinker, cannot with propriety be esteemed a learned man. He may have an immense store of learning, but he cannot apply it; and for all the benefit it will prove to his fellow men, it might as well have remained in his library as to be in his mind. A book-worm is but a drone. Science and knowledge of mankind are of a congenial nature, and flourish best in the neighborhood of each other. To attempt teaching the one without the other will be of little advantage to the student. Learning, without wisdom, makes men pedants; and reflection, without learning, makes them visionaries. They must be concomitant. The former collects the materials, the latter arranges them. One word expresses the secret of true intellectual greatness,—thought, patient and untiring thought. Aristotle, whose mighty intellect is the greatest wonder of antiquity, owed all his greatness to patient thought. Lord Brougham, whose genius towers so far above other men, that he seems a being of superior creation, who “down from higher regions came to see what lay beneath,” owes all to common sense, indefatigable industry, and patient thought. And our own Wirt, whose talents as a lawyer and a statesman were only equalled by the virtues of his heart, when perplexing and intricate subjects arose, had this motto, “*Think it out.*”

But while this attention is paid to the improvement of the understanding, the taste and imagination must not be neglected. It is, perhaps, a fault of modern education, that the young mind is burdened with nothing but facts, while fancy and feeling are suppressed. All the blandishments of literature, should contribute to refine and polish each thought and sen-

timent. Refined taste and powerful intellect are by no means incompatible. They rather assist than militate against each other. A Doric temple exhibits strength and fair proportion. The firmness of the structure no less than the chaste whiteness of the Parian marble, affords pleasure to the beholder. The strong pedestal enhances the beauty of the lightly springing fluted column. An accomplished scholar should be familiar with the stern generalizing power of the stagyrite, as the benevolent, soul-breathing sentiments of Plato: he should accompany Homer in his sublime flights, and the bard of Mantua in his sweetest, most melodious numbers: he should descend with Herschel into the profound depths of mathematical calculation, and ascend with Milton or Pollock to the highest heavens, converse with sinless angels, and with reverence and awe approach the throne of the everliving God: he should be profound in thought, lively in imagination, logical in method, and chaste and refined in taste. All this cannot always be obtained by them; but it always should be the object of pursuit.

MORAL DISCIPLINE. Without moral excellence, high literary attainments seem only to increase the power of doing evil. A man of great talent without principle, like a fallen angel, throws around him an unholy atmosphere, whose malignity blasts and withers all that comes within the sphere of its influence. Instructors are not necessarily teachers of religion; but if they do their duty, they will strive to make as deep a moral impression as possible. The greatest care should be taken that erroneous opinions be not formed. Errors of youth are hard to be shaken off. I am no sectary, and never can be a teacher of creeds and confessions; but my influence shall always be thrown on the side of evangelical christianity. The frigid rules of philosophical morality will not have a salutary effect on the young mind: they congeal the warm feelings of devotion which glow with ardor in the youthful heart. The Bible, without gloss or comment, is the only unerring standard. The Bible, which sheds around it a soft calm lustre,---as much more lovely than the flickering blaze of philosophy as the ethereal, virgin light of Arcturus,---is more pure than the lurid and sickly glare of the meteor that exhales from the rotting carcasses of the slain. I shall, alike, disregard the opinions of those who would have every college a school of theology, and those who at every appearance of religion attempt to raise the cry of sectarianism. But it can never be my duty to teach doctrines; it is the spirit I shall endeavor to inculcate. I shall likewise discourage vice and immorality, by endeavoring to convince that they are equally inconsistent with the character of a gentleman and a christian. A refined and chivalrous sense of honor is closely allied to religion; at least, "it aids and strengthens virtue where she is, and imitates her where she is not."

GOVERNMENT. Intercourse between the instructor and pupil should be based on mutual confidence. Harshness on the part of the preceptor ensures for him the hatred of the pupil, and seldom fails to render the latter deceitful or rebellious. Want of dignity also throws off all restraint, by diminishing necessary respect. Time was when the professor thought it best comported with his character to assume the most marked severity: in modern times, the method sometimes is to bring every thing to the

standard of "gentlemanly intercourse," and depend solely on the honor of the student for every performance of duty. These are evidently the extremes, and the true course lies between them. To suppose the latter practicable is idle, and manifests great ignorance about the government of youth; to adopt the former, is to cut off many opportunities of doing good. It is necessary for the instructor to know every action, and, if possible, every thought of his pupil; to enter into all his feelings; to encourage all that are proper, and discourage all that are improper. By advice and interesting conversation, he should strive to prevent violations of order, and punish in such a way as to leave no ground for the delinquent to suppose there was any other motive than sincere regard for his reformation. All punishments should be of a moral nature, and unnecessary degradation should be studiously avoided. Moreover, mutual affection should be cultivated and inspired. When this can be attained, the few turbulent spirits which will occasionally break through the rules of discipline can be singled out and punished.

Thus have I endeavored to give concisely my opinions respecting my duties and the course I intend to pursue. To inspire all my pupils with sublime ideas of human intellect, and to impart that acute moral sense which shrinks from the pollution of vice, is beyond my power. It were an idle dream to anticipate success in all we wish. Many difficulties will arise to darken the brightest prospects, and disturb order however firmly established. Nevertheless, although we do not accomplish all that is desirable, yet, by striving for all, we shall not fail to obtain much. If my humble qualifications enable me to assist in advancing the standard of education in the South, and demonstrate, by a successful experiment, that schools and colleges may flourish in Mississippi, I shall be extremely happy. And if I can, in any considerable degree, contribute to train up youth who shall become talented and virtuous men in this community, it will be an unfailing source of pleasure to me to the latest period of my life.